

# **Memories of Janet Cruickshank, nee Mellor**

## **Uttoxeter's first female ophthalmist**

**1912-2015**

### **FOREWORD**

In the autumn of 2010 I was put in touch with 98 year old Mrs. Janet Cruickshank, nee Mellor, a retired optician and only surviving daughter of Uttoxeter chemist Ernest Mellor, who was living in a care home in Ballater, Scotland.

At the time I was researching the history of Fole Mill near Uttoxeter and I wrote to Janet in the hope that she might have some memories of the old mill having been born in Uttoxeter in 1912. Janet and I corresponded regularly for about five years. Her handwriting at such an advanced age was always legible and her memory and sharpness of mind were quite incredible. She was a little forgetful at times and I sometimes I had to ask her the same questions a few times before I got an answer. In her letters she told me about her life in Uttoxeter in the early 1900s and a lot of previously unknown details of her father's early life and training as a chemist. She loaned me her precious family photos many of which appear in this memoir and were taken by her father Ernest. Janet was delighted when I told her that I was going to publish online her father's hand-written memories of Uttoxeter when he was a child in the 1890s. They had been unearthed after lying unseen for fifty years. In her letters Janet mentioned the schools she had attended in Uttoxeter, Ladbroke Nursery School on the High Street, Manor House School for Girls, Red Gables Boarding School and Uttoxeter Girls' High School. I was surprised to find that there was little on any of these schools even online which led me to start researching Uttoxeter schools. The result is a 176 page document A Chronicle of Uttoxeter Schools which is still growing and hopefully will one day be published. Although Janet had very little to offer on Fole Mill she provided me with plenty of information on Uttoxeter and the outcome of our five year correspondence was that I was able to collate Janet's own memories and make them into a booklet for her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in March 2012.

I am grateful to her cousin-in-law Mrs Joy Dunicliff, author and writer of Uttoxeter, who put me in touch with Janet Cruickshank. Joy's husband John also an author of Uttoxeter-related books and a dentist in Uttoxeter for many years, was the son of Percy Dunicliff the brother of Janet's mother Mabel. Thanks, too, to Gillian Taylor-Shaw of Manchester & Lancashire Family History Society, who lived not far from Ballater and who visited Janet for me in the care home, took some photos and got some answers from her to some of my questions that Janet had not managed to answer. Gillian also helped me with the research into Janet's father's probationary time as a trainee chemist at San Remo in Italy. Thanks are also due to Janet's nephew Geoffrey Sheddick for family information and the loan of his collection of the booklets Uttoxeter Girls' High School Chronicles inherited from his mother and aunts, all former pupils of the school, John Woodward of Fole for the use of the photos of Uttoxeter Girls' High School, Maurice Birks of Uttoxeter for the recent photos of 32 Market Place and Sue, Janet's helper who came in to help Janet for two hours a week at Craigard Care Home and in the last few months helped to write Janet's letters for her. She and Janet had a few laughs together.

Like her father, Janet's story needed to be told.

Jim Foley 2017



Janet Mellor, married name Cruickshank, as a young woman in Uttoxeter 1930s-40s

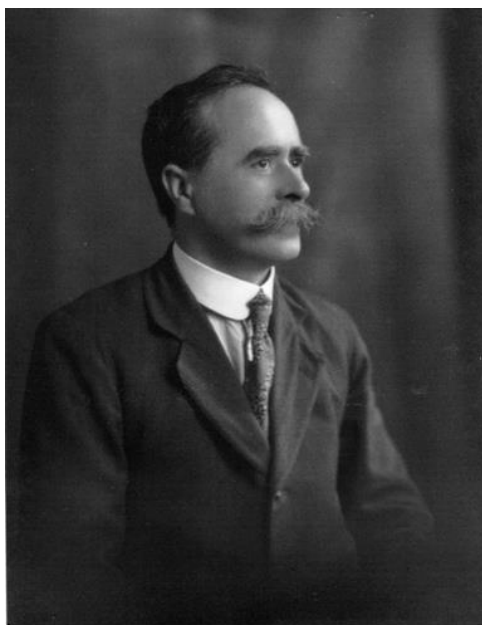
I was born on March 22nd 1912 at The Redlands, 39 New Road, Uttoxeter, the eldest of three daughters of Ernest Martin and Mabel Louise Mellor, nee Dunicliff. My mother had a midwife in attendance. My father did not attend as it was not the custom to do so in those days. I was christened Janet Garle Mellor – Garle which was the maiden name of my maternal grandmother whose father William Garle was a farmer with 156 acres at Milwich. My father, Ernest Martin Mellor and known as EMM to his friends, had a chemist shop at 32 Market Place, Uttoxeter for fifty years from 1910 to the early 1960s. The shop, which we referred to as the Top Shop, was opposite the memorial to Dr Samuel Johnson who is best known for compiling A Dictionary of the English Language in 1755. Johnson's father ran a bookstall further along on what was then called Bear Hill. One day Mr Johnson Snr asked his son for help with the bookstall but he refused to help thinking it was beneath his dignity. Years later when he had become famous, Dr Johnson returned to Uttoxeter and stood near the spot in the rain to mark his repentance for his youthful arrogance. Many many years later I opened my optician's shop near that spot at No 12 The Square.

My parents were married in September 1910 in the Congregational Church, Carter Street, Uttoxeter. My father, born in 1876 in Longton in the Potteries as Stoke on Trent is known, was one of four children born to Thomas Martin Mellor and Emma Mellor, nee Mottershead from Bala in Wales whose father was a sheep farmer there. My mother Mabel Dunicliff was born in 1888 in Uttoxeter. Her father Frederick Dunicliff ran a Clothier & Outfitters shop in Market Place where the family lived. Thomas Mellor, my other grandfather, had been Station Master at Uttoxeter for 33 years from 1876 to 1909 so from a very young age my father was steeped in the love of the railways. He enjoyed helping to polish some of those beautiful engines in the loco sheds during his school holidays and at weekends and bank holidays.



**Janet Mellor with her parents Ernest and Mabel Mellor, nee Dunicliff circa 1913.**

My father left school in 1888 aged twelve years old and then taught as a pupil-teacher for about three years, which was usual in those days for the brighter students. After that he worked on the railways becoming finally a detective inspector. In the 1901 census he is recorded as a Chemicals Assistant and living with his parents. I have recently discovered that he studied photography for two years at Burslem Art School, Stoke on Trent, which at that time was highly regarded. He became an expert in design which explains his later love of art and photography. He visited Norway where he took many beautiful photos which he later made into slides and then gave illustrated talks to groups in the Uttoxeter area. At some stage my father decided to train to become a pharmacist and went to Edinburgh to study chemistry as this was what was required in those days there being no such thing as a course in pharmacy.



**Ernest Martin Mellor (EMM)**

While he was there he became friends with Bert Kemp who was also training to be a chemist. They had a mutual love of mountains, there were plenty of them in Scotland, and both were intrepid climbers. In those days mountain climbing was no mean feat without the complicated contraptions of modern climbing. My father's love of mountains was passed on to our mother and to us children and as children we spent many happy days climbing as a family. Bert Kemp eventually came to work at Hartshill Hospital in Stoke on Trent not far from us in Uttoxeter. I believe he went on to become mayor of the city with his wife Emmy as mayoress. Also while my father was at Edinburgh he made friends with another fellow student named Squire whose family owned a renowned chemist emporium in Italy known as F.R. Squire of San Remo. San Remo, or Sanremo as it is also known, was the seaside resort favoured by many of the crowned heads of Europe for their summer retreat but it was also frequented by them even in winter because of its mild climate. I believe my father spent a holiday with his friend in San Remo and was invited by Mr. Squire to work there when he qualified to gain some experience. This would have been around 1907/8. Squire's Emporium in San Remo where my father worked for two years had many of these royals on its books. It was a great opportunity and a rewarding experience which I understand my father thoroughly enjoyed and he became a fluent speaker in Italian. He was allowed to bring back many prescriptions from this famous emporium and eventually put them to good use over the years in his own chemist shop in Uttoxeter.

When my father returned to Uttoxeter he worked as an assistant chemist and druggist for Hankinsons Chemists & Druggists at their shop near the bottom of Uttoxeter High Street. Many years later it became Boots the Chemists. It was in 1910 that he opened his first chemist shop just round the corner at No.32 Market Place which was originally The Old Crown Inn with a huge stable and yard at the back approached by a covered way from The Market Place. My father used the old stable to store farm seeds and agricultural as well as medically related products. It seems odd now that chemist shops in those days sold such things. There had been an earlier Crown Inn opposite on the corner of Market Place and Market Street.



**Market Place Uttoxeter circa 1911. Mellor's Chemists was in the building which had once been the Old Crown Inn No.32 Market Place. The passageway can be seen behind the woman in the hat. The Old Calabar signs above the shop advertised animal feeds for chickens, poultry and game. Chemists in those days sold unusual things.**



Almost directly opposite my father's chemist shop at No 32 Market Place was Dunicliff's Clothier & Outfitters store where my mother's father Frederick Dunicliff had his business which was also the family home. My mother Mabel lived there as child with her brothers Frederick, Percy and William, sister Ethel and their parents Frederick and Sarah Dunicliff, my Dunicliff grandparents. The Dunicliff ancestors had been in the clothing business in Uttoxeter for many years.



Dunicliff's Clothier & Outfitters can be seen immediately to the right of the kiosk. As a child my mother Mabel lived there above the shop with her parents and siblings. Mellor's chemist shop was in the three storey building on the right opposite where the horse and cart is passing.



A sachet of Mellor's Shampoo Powder with instructions for use. After Janet left Uttoxeter in 1947 her father Ernest Mellor qualified as an optician in his own right.

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### ERNEST M. MELLOR, M.P.S.,

*(From Mr. F. R. Squire, San Remo, Chemist to H.M. the King.)*

Dispensing and Family Chemist and Toilet Specialist,  
**MARKET PLACE, UTTOXETER.**

*(Opposite Doctor Johnson's Monument.)*

**Mellor's Chemist Shop 32 Market Place Uttoxeter.**

Over the shop the wording "From Mr. F.R. Squire, San Remo, Chemist to H.H. The King" advertised Ernest Mellor's training at the renowned chemist shop in Italy. It seems strange to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that chemists once sold agricultural seeds, bird seed and animal foods alongside medicines, perfumes and soaps.

I believe my parents first met my through their mutual love of music. My mother Mabel Dunicliff was a good soprano and her sister Ethel a good contralto and I inherited a love of choral singing. It has been my life-long uplift as well as gardening. My father Ernest not only played the organ but was a soloist tenor/baritone. They were married on September 29<sup>th</sup> 1910. The house The Redlands, 39 New Road, Uttoxeter was built for Grandpa and Grandma Mellor by their son Thomas who was known as Jim. My grandparents let my parents have their house and they moved to 18 Bridge Street near my grandfather's old workplace at the station.





**Wedding photo of Ernest Martin Mellor and Mabel Dunicliff, Uttoxeter September 29th 1910 taken in the back garden of Janet's Dunicliff grandparents' house 40 Balance Street, Uttoxeter.**

**On Ernest's right is his brother Thomas 'Jim' Mellor. Seated at the front is his father Thomas Mellor, the Station Master at Uttoxeter and his mother Emma. Mabel's parents, Frederick and Sarah Dunicliff, nee Garle are seated on the right. At the end of the back row on the right is Percy Dunicliff Mabel's brother and on the front row extreme right is Ethel Dunicliff Mabel's sister. William 'Billy' Dunicliff behind the bride is wearing glasses. Thanks to Gillian Taylor-Shaw who used her phone to take this photo of a framed photo in Janet's room at the care home in Ballater..**

Apart from myself Janet Garle born 1912, there was Margaret Louise born 1915 and Gwyneth Hope born 1923. I was only two years old when the First World War began. My earliest memory is from 1916 when I was four years old helping my father with the oxygen cylinders which he was responsible for in the area. It was quite a performance as they were extremely heavy. Our only transport was bicycle in those days. We were one and quarter miles out of town and the old stables behind our shop where the cylinders were stored. It was no mean feat.

When I was a small girl during the First World War our doctor, Dr George Herbert, with the aid of his invincible wife Ethel, performed miracles. There was no anaesthetic available in their surgery. My job was to open and shut doors and generally making myself useful. Just as a matter of interest Dr Herbert performed several operations on me in my youth. When I was about four he sewed up my wrist which I cut badly on the glass garden frame and a few years later he sewed up my heel after a heavy form fell on it at school causing a huge blister which he lanced before sewing it up without anaesthetic.

Another memory I have of those days is of being in our front garden at The Redlands at the age of four and waving to a little baby boy who was being wheeled past our house in his pram by his nanny on the way to town. His family lived further up the road at a big house called The Parks. His parents were well off and well known in Uttoxeter as were the other members of that large Catholic family the Bamfords. The little boy's parents were Cyril and Dolores Bamford and he, of course, was none other than Joseph Cyril Bamford the founder of JCB the initials that are renowned world-wide for the factories and their product the yellow mechanical diggers which frequent a lot of building sites in this country and in many countries around the world. Much has been written about the Bamfords and Joe Bamford's split with the family to start his own business to go in the direction he wanted to go. My father knew all the Bamfords. Joe sold his first digger at Uttoxeter Market outside my father's shop. Later I was instrumental in introducing him to one of my wealthy clients, Mrs Cavendish of Crakemarth Hall, from whom he rented out the stables so that he could expand his fledgling business.

We were a very happy family. Our house The Redlands at 39 New Road was a striking looking house with black and white gables, front porch and balcony outside the front bedroom window and red roof hence the house name. There was a large rear garden with three lawns, rambling roses, arches, flowers, vegetables and fruit bushes and opening on to hayfields at the back. We were lucky indeed and often in the summer we would eat outside. We always looked forward to our holidays and in Wales particularly where we went mountain climbing and bathing in the sea.



**Mellor family in the back garden of their home, The Redlands, 39 New Road, Uttoxeter in 1932.  
L to R: Janet, Margaret, Ernest Mellor - Emm. Seated: a family friend, Florence Young  
Gwyneth half-hidden by my mother's knee.**

My father was a great lover of maps. He was, of course, a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. On Sunday mornings he would hang a huge coloured wall map on our kitchen wall and while we enjoyed our breakfast of boiled eggs we would have a lesson in geography with mother joining in. The countries of the world were totally different in those days and there were a lot of them coloured red indicating they were part of the British Empire. We learned a tremendous amount during those impromptu lessons.



As I said earlier my grandfather Thomas Mellor was Station Master at Uttoxeter for thirty three years. He had retired in 1909 three years before I was born. In photos from this time as Station Master he is wearing a cap with brim, rather like a French gendarme with buttoned jacket rather like a butler. I remember him quite vividly as being fairly tall and thin. My grandfather used to talk about his time on the railways. Uttoxeter had rail connections with Derby, Stoke on Trent and Manchester via Leek and Moorlands. There was also a train to Stafford. Whenever local V.I.Ps were expected at the station Grandfather would put out the Red Carpet for them which was the tradition in those days when important people arrived. He became very friendly with the Dowager Countess of Shrewsbury and Talbot of Alton Towers so much so that he could take his family for a picnic in the beautiful gardens on the Alton Estate whenever he liked even after she had departed this world. My grandfather was instructed to go through the back entrance by a green door in the ivy covered wall. No key was needed. It was easy to get there as Grandfather took his family on the train from Uttoxeter Station straight to Alton Station on the Churnet Valley Railway Line. We had many afternoons there and often enjoyed home-baked luscious teas followed by tinned peaches and real cream at the gardener's cottage which were real luxuries in those days. There was also a Swiss Cottage in the gardens and a Japanese Pagoda. Eventually all became overgrown. The massive stone entrance with solid metal gates opened out to Alton railway station which was very busy in those days. I actually bought a brick for £5 as a small memento when The Towers were sold.



**My grandfather Thomas Mellor, Station Master Uttoxeter Railway Station. My grandmother Emma Mellor, nee Garle is on the left. Photo courtesy North Staffordshire Railways.**

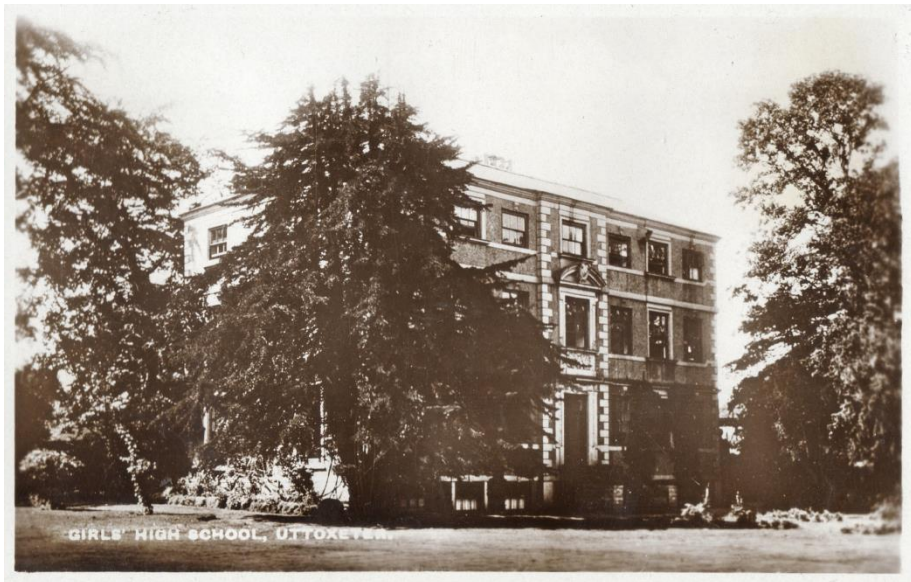
Shortly before my grandfather's retirement in 1909 a short article on his career with the North Staffordshire railway appeared in The Derby Daily Telegraph of September 11th.

"After 57 years' service on the North Staffordshire Railway, Mr Thomas Mellor, the station-master at Uttoxeter, will retire at the end of October. Mr Mellor, who has been a faithful servant of the company, has seen service as porter, ticket-collector, passenger guard, foreman at Nottingham and Stoke, traffic inspector, signal inspector, and for the last 33 years has ably fulfilled the duties of station-master at Uttoxeter. During his long period of service, Mr Mellor has been stationed at Cheddleton, Stoke, Stone, Longport, Derby, Nottingham and Uttoxeter, and he has always enjoyed the respect and esteem of the travelling public."



**Thomas and Emma Mellor, nee Garle, Janet's grandparents in 1910**

Between two and four years of age, 1914-1916, I attended Ladbroke School a private Nursery School for boys and girls on the High Street opposite where the library is. It was the same nursery school that my mother Mabel and her sister Ethel Dunicliff had attended some twenty years or so previously in the 1890s. About 1917 when I was five I started at Manor House School which was a private school for girls at 59 High Street across the road from Ladbroke School. I was in the Junior Department which accepted boys and girls up to the age of twelve and was run by Miss Minna Beck, a Danish teacher who spoke fluent English. There was a big bay window which opened out onto a beautiful garden and most of our lessons were outdoors when the weather was good in the summer. We were a happy band. The property was owned privately and we enjoyed our schooling with the aid of a young assistant teacher. We had an excellent comprehensive education. In 1919 Manor House School was taken over Staffordshire County Council Education Department and renamed Uttoxeter Girls' High School. In 1922 the school moved to The Hall on Dove Bank. The old school building at 59 High Street became the Junior Section of Uttoxeter Girls' High School with boys being accepted up to the age of 12. It was also a boarding school for the High School called Red Gables which was run by Miss Astrid Beck, Minna Beck's older sister. I was a boarder there along with my two younger sisters at Red Gables a number of times when our mother was not well. In 1923 at the age of eleven years I was transferred to the senior department of Uttoxeter Girls' High School at The Hall a splendid old building with beautiful gardens, tennis courts and playing fields on Dove Bank. Miss Jessie Malvern, the daughter of an Irish Methodist minister and a 'fugitive' from Ireland because of the Troubles, was one of my teachers. She was a strict regimentarian and helped to shape our lives. She was a brilliant musician and second to none. She taught me the piano so I know. I rang the large bell for the start of the school day and every day I played the piano for School Assembly. I got to know which hymns to play.



**The Hall, Dovebank, Uttoxeter where Uttoxeter Girls' High School moved to in 1922.**



**Staff at Uttoxeter Girls' High School in 1928.**

**Front L to R: Miss Walker, Miss Woodhead (Head), Miss Astrid Beck, Miss Jessie Malvern.**

**Middle: Miss Woodrow, Miss Timberlake, Miss Pascoe, Miss Muriel Price.**

**Back: Miss Scotter, not known.**

The other school mistresses that I remember were Miss Budgen, Head Mistress and Scripture, Miss Walker for Sports and General Demeanour and Behaviour, Miss Pascoe for French, Miss Astrid Beck for History and Scripture, very character shaping, Miss Timberlake, Miss Windrow for Latin, Miss Willater for Geography, Miss Woodhead another Head Mistress who was a brilliant Art Teacher and another Head Mistress earlier who taught us History but whose name I can no longer recall. Weekly we had visiting teachers from nearby Alleyne's Grammar (Boys') School for Art, Chemistry and Private Music. I can remember Mr Tavernor for piano lessons. In 1930 I was appointed Head Girl and the winner of a coveted school prize.

Miss Woodhead our head mistress and art teacher filled me with enthusiasm for art which remained with me for the rest of my life. In 1936 at her own expense she took four of us girls from the Sixth Form to see the Italian Art Exhibition at Burlington House, London. The paintings were lent by



Mussolini and comprised the greatest collection of Italian masterpieces under one roof. They came from every gallery in Italy and from many private collections.



**Girls in Jupiter House Utttoxeter Girls High School 1928.**

**Back Row: Ida Finnie (2<sup>nd</sup> left).**

**Middle Row: Name not known, Grace Hamilton (2<sup>nd</sup> left), Sally Harper, Miss Windrow, Miss Price, Janet Mellor, Janet Miller, Gwen Philips.**

**Front Row: Mary Reeves. Lucy Atkins (4<sup>th</sup> left), Sadie Prince (3<sup>rd</sup> right).**

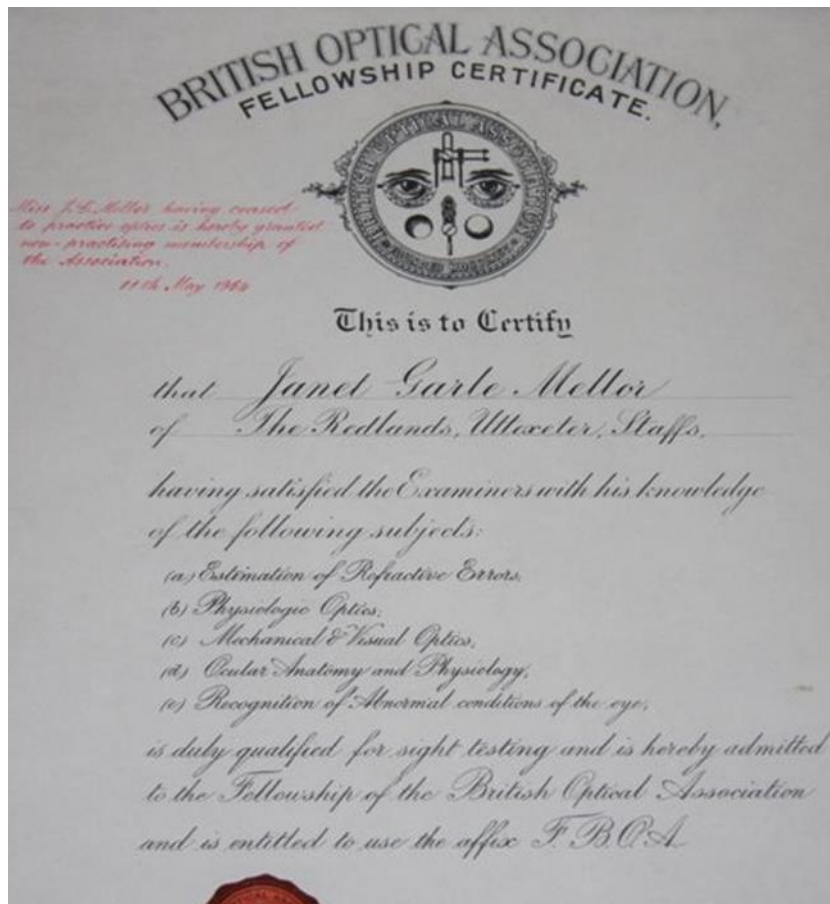
My mother suffered from post-natal depression which was not very well understood in those days. On the advice of our doctor my father took her abroad for a holiday. I was lucky to accompany them as it was the school summer holidays. We went to Italy and stayed in the Lugano-Como area. We travelled by train through the St. Gothard Pass remarkable for its circles in the mountain and passing the same church five times as we circled in spirals in and out of the mountain. I have vivid memories of it yet. The ingenuity of the Italian and Swiss engineers was indeed fantastic. It was very hot and the fresh mountain air was most welcome. The Swiss lakes were beautiful and the folk were very friendly. It was wonderful to visit Milan and to stand in front of the Da Vinci's mural The Last Supper on a wall of the refectory adjoining the Basilica di Santa Maria delle Grazie and to visit the famous St Ambrose Cathedral. We also visited Venice, and that too, was another incredible experience. It certainly helped my mother whose spirit was lifted by our visit to this remarkable country. When we returned home I wrote a poem about Venice and submitted for the poetry prize at Utttoxeter Girls' High School. I was very pleased when it received the first prize. My mother and I looked alike and I was often mistaken for her.



**Janet with her mother in Italy circa 1928.**

In 1930 I left school aged 18 years and was registered as an apprentice chemistry student and embarked on a very demanding course for optics for the sum of 5/- per week for four years. My father decided instead to send me to Nottingham University to study chemistry. I attended Florence Boot Hall, the oldest hall on the campus, named after the wife of Jessie Boot, founder of Boots the nationwide chain of chemist shops. I found the course difficult but with coaching from Dr Margaret Dobson I passed my exams. My father decided that I should attend a well-known private optical institute in London. Suddenly I was sent by train to London and instructed to take a taxi to a boarding house in Clapham in SW London, run by a Scots woman in a wheel chair and her assistant Miss Forman/Miss Darrel. They were very kind and helpful to me. I was finally given a large room which I shared with a lady from Cornwall who was a chemist. We got on fine. I attended the British Optical Institute in Brixton, London a private college run by the French Doctor Max Coque (1867-1933). He was brilliant and was 'before his time'. My father met him and was very impressed.

I acquired my Optical Fellowship at Christmas 1932 when I was twenty years old but legally I was not allowed to practise until I attained my 21st birthday on March 22nd 1933 and finally received my Fellowship of the British Optical Association – ABOA having received the help of private tutors along the way. I was one of only six other female opticians in England and Wales, and the first one in Uttoxeter. I returned to join my father as an associate in his chemist shop in Uttoxeter where he supervised me during my probationary period.



Janet Garle Mellor's FBOA Certificate

Eventually I obtained my own optician's practice but paid my father £6 per week for the privilege of using rooms on the first floor above the chemist shop where I had a large room, a waiting room and a toilet. Later a series of alterations to the ground floor enabled me to have my own consulting rooms there making it easier for my customers particularly the elderly. Business soared. Thanks to my training with Dr.Coque I had an excellent knowledge of diseases of the eye. I was fortunate to have a great rapport with three ophthalmic consultants, Mr. McMurray from Stoke on Trent, one from Stafford and one from Burton on Trent whose names unfortunately I can no longer recall. The consultants personally contacted me by letter after being referred by G.P.s. because of my specialism in diseases of the eye. Phones were few and far between in those days so everything was done by letter. I was my father's colleague and at one time actually oversaw him on account of my degree, F.B.O.A. (Fellow) whereas he was D.B.O.A. I was the first female ophthalmist in Uttoxeter. However my father eventually attained his F.B.O.A. and practised as an optician for many years as well as a chemist, much acclaimed.

My father was well-known in the town and was easily recognised walking hatless, when everyone else wore a hat or a cap. He often walked about without a coat. He had to work hard to keep both properties going and he was chairman of so many groups as well as being organist and soloist tenor/baritone. He was elected as chairman of Uttoxeter Urban District Council twice embracing six years altogether but he never claimed any financial allowance whatsoever. He was chairman of the governors of Uttoxeter Girls' High School, Alleyne's Grammar School, Uttoxeter Senior Boys' School under Mr Land, Uttoxeter Senior Girls' School under Miss Hilda Stonehouse with whom there was a great rapport. When my sister Gwyneth went on to teach privately in Madrid he learnt Spanish and won the 1st prize at the Evening Class for Spanish in Uttoxeter of which group he was the chairman. He was a founder member of the Rotary Club of Uttoxeter later traveling abroad along with my mother who was Honorary Secretary of the Ladies Inner Wheel. He was a prominent member of Leek &



Moorlands Building Society along with Arthur Finnikin. My father was a founder member of the Royal Geographical Society and of the Royal Asian Society having a special interest in the Spice Islands about which he wrote a small treatise a History of Homeopathic Remedies of the Far Eastern Islands which has unfortunately been lost. My father was highly educated and artistic with a well-liked personality. Such was my father's reputation that a kindly long distance bus driver would regularly pick him up in town drop him off at our front gate at lunchtimes even though it was not a scheduled bus stop on his route.



**The unveiling of Uttoxeter War Memorial Market Square in November 1928.**  
**L to R: P G Brisbane, Canon Buscot R C Parish Priest, Captain Bamford, Ernest Mellor, Rev W E Charlton Vicar and A C Bunting.**  
**Ernest Mellor was the Chairman of Uttoxeter Urban District Council and a Justice of Peace in 1928.**

Victor Cartwright who was manager of the shop for a considerable time was efficient and well-liked by both customers and staff. He eventually bought and managed his own chemist business in the High Street. My father appointed Arthur Finniken to replace him as the manager of his shop. He, too, was very efficient and he and his wife became good friends of our family. Indeed my father's memoirs which were written towards the end of his life were entrusted to him for safekeeping. My father was a fair boss and warmly regarded by customers and staff alike. When I first started work at my father's shop I was treated no different from the other employees. I started at the bottom, signed on as an apprentice and was paid 5/- per week. At first I was everyone's dogsbody but we were a happy band of juniors. My father turned a blind eye to some of our antics as long as we did our work properly. I have some photos of some of the staff picnics we had in the late 1920s. We all enjoyed ourselves.

The shop opening hours were 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday and 8 p.m. on Saturdays. Both our shops were crowded out on Market Day and during the Cattle Markets but there were no queues. Everyone got served happily with much good humour. At that time Uttoxeter Market was the largest open air market in the North West Midlands. There were stalls everywhere even on the road outside my father's shop.



**Staff from Mellor's Chemist Shop on one of their annual picnics circa 1928.**

**L to R: Mrs Mabel Mellor, Ernest Mellor, Janet Mellor, Margaret Mellor and apprentices from the chemist shop.**

About 1933/34 my father bought a large property 12 The Square where I opened my own optician's shop. We called it the Bottom Shop and my father's chemist shop was known as the Top Shop. The new shop was much more convenient for my customers as it was on the ground floor rather than having to climb stairs to the first floor as they had to at my father's shop. The upstairs flat was rented out. That was how I came to meet the school doctor for Uttoxeter a Doctor Wilhelmina 'Elma' Cruickshank from the Buchan area of Aberdeenshire. We became good friends. It was an event that changed my life.



**About 1933/34 Janet Mellor's optician's shop was opened at 12 The Square, Uttoxeter and referred to by the family as The Bottom Shop. Her father Ernest Mellor's chemist shop was further up on the same side at No. 32 opposite the kiosk and was called The Top Shop. This part of the Market Place was once known as Bear Hill.**



Uttoxeter Market circa 1940s/50s. Mellor's Chemist shop 32 Market Place is on the right with a gap between the stalls to allow customers to get through to the shop and the alleyway at the side.

In November 1936 my father's shop at No.32 suffered a disastrous fire when the errand boy Charlie Cobb dropped a bottle of turpentine over a lighted paraffin stove. Amazingly the Town Fire Brigade, which was privately run, was on the spot almost immediately. Fortunately no one was injured but it was a near shave. Everything that was salvaged had to be moved to the bottom shop at No.12 Market Place. The staff had to squash in and my father helped with dispensing. From November until February it was traumatic. The smell of chemicals lasted ages.

Uttoxeter Advertiser and Ashbourne Times

Wednesday December 4 1936

### **FIRE AT UTTOXETER Damage to Chemist's Shop**

What might have been a very serious fire, probably involving old property in the Crown-yard and the Market Place, Uttoxeter, was averted by the prompt action of the assistants in Mr E M Mellor's chemist's shop opposite the Kiosk and passersby on Wednesday. Being market day a large crowd soon collected and remained to watch the operations of the firemen. About 12.35 p.m. when Charles Cobb, the errand boy at the shop, was in the dispensary at the rear of the shop, about to fill up a bottle with turpentine, the bottom suddenly fell off the supply bottle, precipitating the contents to a lighted paraffin glass used to heat the dispensary. In less time than it takes to tell the dispensary was a roaring furnace and Mr A Stevenson, one of the assistants, who was also in the dispensary, and Cobb only just had time to dash for safety. The call of "Fire" brought the manager, Mr V Cartwright, who was upstairs, and other assistants and Mr T Marsh, who was standing outside the shop, to the scene and a "bucket chain" was immediately formed. The contents of soda water syphons were also directed at the seat of the blaze, which swept through the shop and out of the front door to the Market-place. Mr Cartwright dashed into the dispensary and secured the valuable prescriptions and other books, and another assistant tried to drag out the above. Mr Cartwright's head was singed and he was pulled to safety by Mr T Marsh. As the telephone was in the dispensary it could not be used to summon aid.

A message was sent to the proprietor, Mr Mellor, who was at his other shop in The Square, and he rushed to the scene and worked feverishly with the others who were endeavouring to quell the fire. Water was obtained from the public tap at the Kiosk and from the Maypole Stores next door. In the meantime Uttoxeter Fire Brigade was summoned. The maroon alarm was discharged and in a few minutes the motor-engine and firemen under Capt. G A Fox arrived. Pumping was not resorted to as an adequate supply of



water at sufficient pressure was obtained from a hydrant outside Mr F F Shaw's shop. The flames soon yielded to the efforts of the brigade, the firemen concentrating on clearing the debris in the dispensary, which was completely gutted. The ceiling and shelves of goods in the shop were burnt and scorched and the front door and sign over the front of the shop were blistered. Water did more damage than the fire in the shop, room above, and in the store cellar below the shop. No estimate can be given of the damage to the stock, which is, however, considerable.

**Research courtesy John Woodward from records at Utttoxeter Library**

I had a near fatal accident about 1938 when I was 26. I was riding into town down Dollis Hill on my bicycle when a car suddenly stopped without warning in front of me to pick up a passenger at the foot of the hill. My front wheel hit the car and I went flying through the air. I woke up in Dr Herbert's surgery about two hours later. "Where am I?" I asked the bemused doctor and his wife who were actually smiling. "You have made a huge dent in the back of a car which stopped suddenly in front of you. You might have been killed as you could have somersaulted and broken your neck." I was lucky. As it was, the doctor had stitched up my jawbone before I regained consciousness. The whole town knew about the accident and some were even amused. The bike was rescued and propped up against a garden wall. The contents of my bags, basket and handbag were left unmolested for at least three hours before they were retrieved. Can you imagine that happening today? The driver of the car was the owner of the local garage.

Sadly not long after Grandpa retired he went completely blind with a cataract in each eye. He sat all day unravelling knotted string. My father and I visited him as often as possible. He died in 1921 aged 80 and is buried in Utttoxeter Cemetery. Unfortunately my father inherited cataracts from his father but luckily managed to see well enough to read avidly to the end of his life. He was advised and prescribed tablets for his cataracts by Dr Max Coque my old professor at the British Optical Institute in London where I had trained to be an optician. My father and Dr Coque enjoyed a mutual rapport for a number of years.

During the Second World War Utttoxeter was more fortunate than other towns and cities and didn't suffer too badly from bombing by the Luftwaffe. No actual bombs fell on Utttoxeter but we lost two young men quite early in the war. They were both flying fighter planes either Spitfires or Hurricanes with little hope of survival if hit by enemy action. Both were well known, one from our own chemist shop and one from a well-liked pork butcher's shop. Neither of them was ever found but were reported missing presumed dead. Their parents never recovered from their tragic loss and the whole town was affected. One evening in August 1940 we had an air raid warning. This didn't happen too often but we were used to the warnings. I was sitting on the bed at home at 39 New Road dressed in my Red Cross uniform with my packed suitcase under the bed. I heard something swoosh past my window and I thought if that is a bomb we will all be killed. There was a kind of muffled explosion which seemed to be very close. I was shocked and wondered what had happened. My father who was on air raid warden duty further down the road rushed up to the house. My mother and Margaret were sitting in the narrow passage and he told them there had been a bomb and the road was flooded and asked them to phone for the Fire Brigade to come as soon as possible to pump out the water. No mobile phones in those days so off my mother and sister went to find a phone box. The fire brigade arrived quite quickly. After half an hour or so Mother and Margaret came back. Strange to say they were laughing but it was probably out of sheer relief that none of us had been killed or injured. It was a near thing and it could have been our house that was hit by the stray bomb.

The story that went the rounds later was that an enemy bomber near Uttoxeter was being attacked by RAF fighters and shed its stick of bombs which landed over a wide area but none on the town itself. We later found out that our neighbour Mr Bailey, his wife and fourteen month old baby and Mrs Bailey's father Mr Heath had a remarkable escape. It was into their well that the bomb fell. The parents with the baby were in one room and the blast upturned the bed protecting them from the roof and walls falling in. Mr Heath in another room was unharmed. They were rescued by Mr Tortoiseshell from Parks Farm nearby who with the help of a neighbour got them all out using a ladder.

Being a chemist's daughter I was given charge of medical stores at the Red Cross Centre and First Aid Post which was a mile or so out of town in the stables at Hawthornden Manor. I used to manage the Red Cross First Aid Post there every Thursday night right through until the next morning when I went straight to work. I did this for several years. It was hard work but very rewarding.

On occasions I did Red Cross relief duty at Heath House, the Philips' house near Checkley, to relieve the Night Sister there. It was used as a convalescent home during the war. One night there was a tremendous thunder storm and at first it was thought to be an air raid. The cook who was upstairs in her bedroom at the time became hysterical, a frightening experience I shall never forget. She was upsetting everyone and putting people on edge. I raced along the corridors and tried to assure her that it was not an air raid as she thought. I regret to say that in the end I threw a glass of cold water straight into her face. She fell backwards with the shock, fortunately on to her bed, and finally calmed down. There was a very sick man on the ward with pneumonia we had to care for and it was very frightening. Fortunately we pulled him through.

The post never failed to arrive despite enemy action around the Midlands, especially at Coventry. I remember there were three postal deliveries daily regularly at 9.15 a.m., 12 noon and 4 p.m.

In 1944 my friend Elma Cruickshank who rented the flat above my optician's shop invited me to her wedding in Aberdeen. Elma and I travelled together on the train to Aberdeen where we were met by her brother Andrew who was home on leave for his sister's wedding. Andrew was playing the organ at the wedding and asked Janet if she would like to go with him to have a practice on the organ. It was the beginning of something totally unexpected. The newly-married couple's reception was held at the Northern Hotel. When the newly married couple had departed I met Andrew's family for supper at the hotel. We found that we both shared a love of music as well as his love of the organ and mine of the piano. Andrew and I chatted until three in the morning. The next morning when Andrew had to return to his regiment he asked me to accompany him to the train station. His family told me afterwards that he never liked anyone going to see him off so I must have been special. We had fallen in love and we agreed to write to one another not knowing when we would see one another again. Andrew, who was farmer's son from the Buchan area of Aberdeenshire, worked as a cashier for Aberdeen & Northern Marts a farmer-owned livestock auction company in Kittybrewster, Aberdeen.

Three years later in June 1947 Andrew Cruickshank and I married at the United Reformed Church in Uttoxeter. I remember there was a large crowd outside. We married in the same year as the Queen and our wedding cake was made by the local Elkes Bakery who used the identical ingredients as the wedding cake they provided for the wedding of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip. When I left Uttoxeter in 1947 to start my new life with my husband in Aberdeen I had been an optician in Uttoxeter for fourteen years. My father had to engage, a Mr. Bell who was a retired chemist/optician

from Lincolnshire, as a locum optician to replace me. I travelled down on occasions to help my father out and to act as locum but my father being the man he was eventually qualified as an optician himself.



**Andrew and Janet Cruickshank Aberdeen 1944**

Our first home was 13 Leslie Road which was a large upper flat off Great Northern Road, Aberdeen. It was a very friendly street with good neighbours. At first the idiomatic language bothered me a lot as I couldn't understand it only catching the odd word or phrase. Also Andrew's colleagues were extremely broad spoken which it took me quite some time for my ear to adjust to. The Buchan area seemed cold and blustering to my nature although it was a hot summer after the extraordinary cold winter of 1946. I kept getting tonsillitis and had to go to a private home called Watson and Fraser. I missed my work as an optician and eventually got a job at an optician's Black and Lizars in Aberdeen on a Saturday morning and the odd day now and again.

My husband's musical friends were very kind but still teased me. I endured a lot of banter. Andrew was a highly talented amateur organist and an accomplished musician, and played the organ for Rubislaw Church in Aberdeen while I sang in the choir. He was the secretary of the Aberdeen & District Organists Society and was held in high repute especially for his touch and use of solo stops, painting a picture in which he excelled. Although not a Catholic he was invited to play the organ at Roman Catholic Solemn or High Masses and became adept at it accompanying the choir in the singing of the beautiful Gregorian Chant including the Kyrie Eleison and the wonderful Gloria in Excelsis Deo. Even Roger Williams of Kings College Aberdeen willingly allowed him to play at a few friends' daughters' weddings which was a great honour in those days. We visited many churches up and down the country to take part in organ recitals and attend Organ Congresses including Exeter Cathedral, Bath Abbey and Wells Cathedral. At Bath Abbey Andrew had to play in his stocking feet being on holiday he had not brought his organ shoes. We used the opportunity to visit beauty spots in the various localities around the country. Andrew tried to teach me how to play the organ but I just could not get the hang of

moving my hands and feet at the same time. The complication of stops is quite staggering. I preferred playing the piano and spent many happy hours on it.

When Andrew took early retirement at the age of 62 we were able to travel abroad. Sadly Andrew died of chronic leukaemia in 1995. We had been happily married for 48 years. We had no children. I continued to live at our home in Leslie Road until about ten years ago. In 2002 when I was 90 and could no longer cope on my own even with outside help I moved into Craigard Care Home. Some of the things I miss are my independence and being able to drive about in my car, playing the piano and having the telephone. I did have one until a few years ago but had to give it up because of my deafness.

My father Ernest Martin Mellor was a devoted family man all his life. He continued to run his chemist shop until he was in his 80s in the late 1950s. He died in Uttoxeter on January 12<sup>th</sup> 1961 aged 84 and was buried in Uttoxeter Cemetery next to his parents' grave. My mother died in August 1974 and is buried alongside him. My sister Margaret three years my junior eventually acquired her M.A. degree and became a teacher. Margaret, whose married name was Sheddick, had the first triple heart bypass operation performed by the world famous Egyptian Heart Surgeon Mr Magdi Yacoub. She lived eight and half years of the ten he had hoped for. She had one son Geoffrey Sheddick my nephew.

During the Second World War my youngest sister Gwyneth joined the WRENS – the Women's Royal Naval Service and in 1944 was posted to Ceylon which was renamed Sri Lanka on independence. When the war ended the WRENS had a three week voyage back to England and being women they were not allowed below deck where all the men were packed together. To while away the long hours one of the girls who was Spanish offered to give lessons in Spanish to anyone who was interested. Gwen took full advantage of the lessons which indeed changed her life. When she finally returned home to Uttoxeter she looked after our mother who had developed mouth cancer. Fortunately Mother survived. Gwen became a secretary for two years before she decided to go to Madrid to teach English. After a while she found Madrid too high and dry for her liking and so she learned Portuguese and settled in Lisbon where she continued to teach English in her flat there. During her long summer vacation she used to come and stay with us in Aberdeen.





**Janet with husband Andrew and her sister Gwyneth on a holiday at Callender, Stirling August 26<sup>th</sup> 1955.**

In late 1995 it rained solidly in Lisbon for several weeks and Gwen who had a top floor flat found that the roof wasn't watertight and ended up living, sleeping and giving English lessons in the only dry room in the flat. It was very very depressing and distressing for her. Sadly a few years later she developed Alzheimers and died in Lisbon her adopted home on December 7<sup>th</sup> 2006. She was 83. She never married.

I now live in Craigard Care Home in Ballater, Aberdeenshire. I am quite healthy but find it hard because of my limited mobility, my arthritis and my deafness. I used to have a Zimmer frame to help me walk but now I need to be wheeled about in a wheel chair. I gave up my phone as I could no longer hear what people were saying. My eyesight is not too bad and I can still read using glasses. I correspond regularly with my Uttoxeter friends John Walker, Thornton Ward, Sheila Allen and Jim Foley who is compiling my memories. My own Parish Church at Rubislaw, Aberdeen still support me. Because of my arthritis I'm afraid that my handwriting is sometimes just a scrawl. On March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2012 I celebrated my 100<sup>th</sup> birthday with a party at Craigard Nursing Home and was delighted to receive a telegram from the Queen to congratulate me.



**Mrs Janet Cruickshank FBOA, Centenarian March 22nd 2012.  
Ballater, Scotland.**

Janet Cruickshank died on June 11th 2015 after a short illness aged 103.

OBITUARY

# Centenarian was a trailblazer in the world of opticians



The Press and Journal (Aberdeen) 26 Jun 2015 BY SHONA GOSSIP

Janet Cruickshank, who has died at the age of 103, qualified as an optician in 1932 and was one of the first females to enter the profession in the UK.

Keen as she was to get to work, the trailblazer had to wait four months until she turned 21 and was able to receive her Fellowship of the British Optical Association (FBOA) officially.

She returned from the London Optical Institute to her home

town of Uttoxeter, Staffordshire, where she set up her own practice upstairs from her father's chemist shop.

When she went on to set up shop elsewhere in the town, the flat above was rented to the local school doctor, Elma Cruickshank, who hailed from Ardallie, in Aberdeenshire.

The pair became good friends and, in 1944, Janet travelled to Aberdeen for Elma's wedding.

It was here that Janet met her own husband-to-be in the shape of the bride's brother Andrew.

In her memoirs, collated by historian Jim Foley, Mrs Cruickshank recalled: "An- drew was playing the organ at the wedding and asked me if I would like to go with him to have a practice on it.

"We found that we shared a love of music, with his love of the organ and mine of the piano. Andrew and I chatted until 3am. The



Janet Cruickshank was described as a 'wonderful' determined woman

next morning, when Andrew had to return to his regiment, he asked me to accompany him to the train station. His family told me he never liked anyone going to see him off, so I must have been special.

"We had fallen in love and we agreed to write to one another, not knowing when we would see one another again."

During World War II, Mrs Cruickshank was in charge of

medical stores at the Red Cross Centre and the first-aid post.

After the war, she was reunited with her love and, in 1947, the couple married in Uttoxeter before moving to Aberdeen to start a new life together.

Mr Cruickshank, a farmer's son from Hawkhillock, Ardallie, worked as a cashier at the marts, while his wife began working at Black and Lizars opticians in Aberdeen.

The couple did not have children, but their shared love of music continued through their involvement with Rubislaw Parish Church, where Mrs Cruickshank sang in the choir while her husband played the organ.

Mrs Cruickshank also enjoyed tending to her "beautiful" garden

in the city's Leslie Road and driving her yellow Triumph Dolomite.

She loved the countryside, and often went exploring with her husband until his death in 1995.

She remained at home until 11 years ago, when she moved to Craigard House, in Ballater, where she remained alert by writing to her friends and reading the paper with her magnifying glass.

The home held a party to celebrate her 103rd birthday in March this year, with staff describing Mrs Cruickshank as a "wonderful" determined woman.

Mrs Cruickshank, who died on June 11, is survived by her nephew, Geoff. Her funeral was held in Aberdeen, with donations made to Talking Books for the Blind.

Janet's poem Sonnet on Sunset on the Lagoon in Venice for which she won a prize at Uttroter Girls' High School in 1929. She copied it out in 2012 when she was 100 years old.

ON THE LAGOON  
 1929 SONNET ON SUNSET IN VENICE BY J.G.M.

The evening sun sinks slowly to repose  
 Behind the scattered isles. The water seems  
 Like liquid glass around a land of dreams  
 Where marble churches all lie tinged with ~~ray~~  
 Stately and sud the Palace of the Doges  
 Symbolic mid the lingering sunset ~~gleams~~  
 Of fading glories like a vision gleams  
 Then merges into dimness. Slowly flows  
 The tide, as if afraid to rouse the foam  
 The air a breathless expectation, holds  
 Whilst sinks the last ray, silent the lagoon.  
 Till all that waste of waters, every dome  
 And ship and tower, the traveler beholds  
 Flashed with palest gold beneath the moon.

Judged by Miss Ruegg (her brother Judge) chairman of  
 our school governors) U.S. H.S. as a holiday "play"  
 reminiscence? It won 1st prize! Uttroter 1929-SEPT.  
 My father took my mother & I to the Italian Lakes & Venice  
 by train, stopping off at Milan, where we visited the  
 Cathedral & the Church of St. Ambrose to see the famous  
 painting of the Last Supper by Verrocchio. (on the wall I think)  
 The journey was spectacular, & I was very impressed  
 engineering of railway tunnels, in the mountains among

23-10-72

Will write you later  
 the artist wishes  
 Sarah



## PHOTOS FROM JANET'S ALBUM



**Margaret, Mrs Mellor and Janet in the 1920s on Careg Fawr Mountain, Wales.**



**Family outing on a beach in North Wales in the early 1920s.**



**Father and daughters on summit of a Welsh mountain.**



**Janet and her youngest sister Gwyneth**



**Janet with her younger sister Margaret**



**Mellor's Chemists staff outing circa 1928.**

**Mrs. Mellor at the back with daughter Janet in front of her. The woman in the white furry hat is Dorothy Chatfield with Ted Atkins behind her. They later married.**



**Janet Mellor with some of her friends at the family home Redlands, New road, Uttoxeter 1940.  
Jim, Lloyd Evans, Janet, Steve, Enid**



**Mellor Group Back Garden of 40 Balance Street circa 1950s**

**Back L to R: Uncle Percy Dunicliff, Father Ernest Mellor, Sister Gwyneth Mellor, Uncle Billy Dunicliff, Auntie Rose, Sister Margaret Sheddick, nee Mellor.**

**Middle L to R: Janet Mellor, Mother Mabel Mellor nee Dunicliff, Grandma Sarah Dunicliff nee Garle, Auntie Dorothy, Uncle Fred Dunicliff,**

**Boys: Nephew John and Nephew Richard.**



Janet in her retirement at her home and in the care home Aberdeen







Peter Pike's Chemist Shop which followed Mellor's Chemists at 32 Market Place. Photo Maurice Birks 1990s.



In 2012 a pub called The Academy occupied Mellor's old chemist shop at 32 Market Place. Photo Maurice Birks. Later it was a club or a pub called the Sizzling Sausage. In 2017 it is a club called Society & Manhattans.

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